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# Religious Studies

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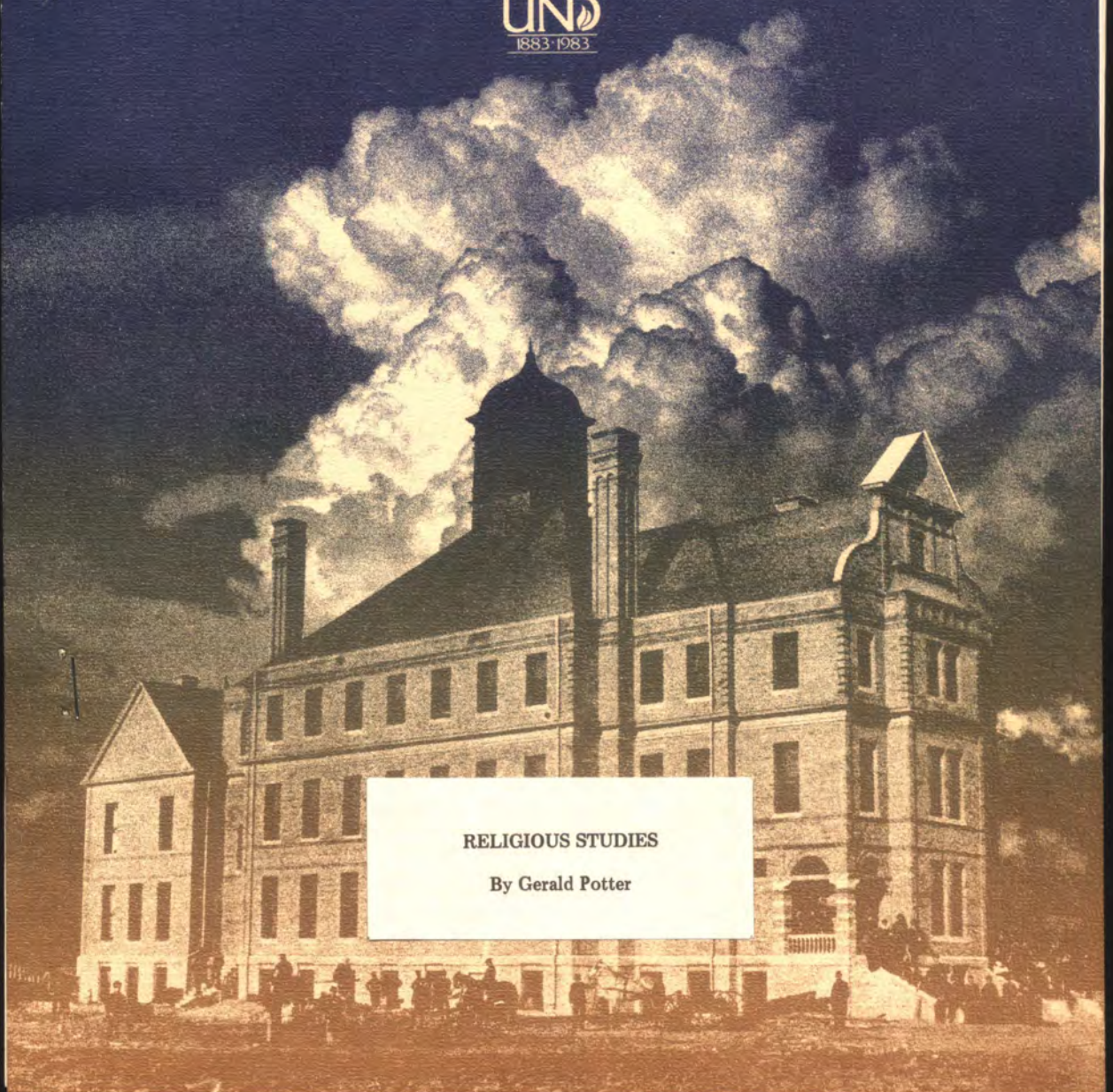
# DEPARTMENTAL HISTORIES

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA, GRAND FORKS



RELIGIOUS STUDIES

By Gerald Potter





This description of the development of the department from its beginnings in the earlier years of the century provides an understanding of the historical continuity in the teaching of religion courses at UND. Two dates are pivotal, '62 and '66. The University continued its responsibility for crediting courses it approved as it had in the past through affiliation, and now granted academic rank to those in the department, and provided classroom and office space on campus. Salaries of the teaching faculty alone remained the responsibility of the denominational centers.

In 1966 the University Senate appointed an ad hoc committee to review the departmental structure, program and progress and report its findings to the Senate. Members of the committee were Dean Clifford, Business and Public Administration, Dean Harwood, School of Medicine, Professors McBride, Mathematics, Oslund, English, and Thomforde, Engineering. On June 13, 1966, the following report was presented to the Senate by the secretary, Dean Harwood:

#### COMMITTEE ON RELIGION REPORT

The Committee to study and report on the Department of Religion was appointed by the Committee on Committees of the Senate, March 17, 1966, with the following members: Miss Oslund, Dean Clifford, Professor Thomforde, Professor McBride, and Dean Harwood. The group elected Miss Oslund as Chairman and Dean Harwood as Secretary.

Eight meetings were held. At the first meeting on March 21st, the Committee was briefed on the organization of the Department and some of the problems encountered in its development. The members of the Religion Department in turn attended the next five weekly meetings. Literature concerning the problems of a Department of Religion in a State University was made available to the Committee members by Dr. Ziemke, Mr. Sheffield and Father Brannonier.

The Committee findings and recommendations are as follows:

1. The Committee believes that the University should continue to have a Department of Religion.
2. The Department must be a strong, independent, academically oriented one with high intellectual content. The criteria set up for a faculty appointment must be followed.
3. The Chairman must have the same duties, responsibilities, and authority as other Department Chairmen.
4. Faculty members in the Department should devote all of their time to departmental functions.
5. A sharp delineation should be made between the function of a Department of Religion, counseling and guidance and pastoral duties. Parochialism should be avoided in course selection and course content. The Department should make every attempt to broaden its offerings to include Judaism and the Oriental religions, preferably by adding a teacher qualified in these areas.

6. The above aims would be best served if all department members were full-time employees of the University, paid by University funds. If this is not possible, the Chairman should be a full-time employee and funds for the other faculty salaries should be paid through the Business Office of the University. If the University cannot fund any of the positions, the salaries should be paid through the University Business Office. Although there are disadvantages to having the Department teaching staff paid by their respective church organizations, it can work under the present arrangements with cooperation and mutual respect between the members.

June 13, 1966

T. H. Harwood, M.D.  
Secretary

After a review of the teaching of religion at UND, the ad hoc committee also studied models currently used in other state universities in developing departments of religion. Since the teaching staff in the department, with one exception, had responsibilities outside the department, the committee felt it proper to make recommendations which would gradually establish a faculty devoted full-time to teaching and research, studying and teaching about religion with academic integrity according to the principles of academic freedom and free of parochialism and partisanship. It also recommended the expansion of the religion program beyond its historically Christian emphasis into the areas of Jewish and non-biblical or Eastern religions. At the same time the committee noted the desirability of having the faculty positions funded from state appropriations--if not immediately then on a gradual basis--beginning with the chairperson.

The recommendations were accepted by the University Senate, and the department proceeded to implement them. In 1966 Dr. Gerald Potter became chairman, and the one-year rotation system, by consent of the faculty and the university administration, was abandoned, and the chairman, like all other departments, was to be elected and serve, usually three years. Program expansion followed the Senate recommendations. The curriculum expanded to include new courses in Jewish studies with the part-time appointment of Rabbi Gerald Steinberg, who continued to teach in the department until 1972. He was succeeded by Rabbi Lester Miller, also of Winnipeg, Manitoba. In the latter years of the seventies, because of the difficulties of securing a part-time specialist in the area of Jewish studies, the department has had to look closer to home, namely, Concordia College in Moorhead and the resident Rabbi in Fargo who sometimes has the appropriate academic credentials. Dr. Carleton Green, who was associated with Wesley College and the department of religion and taught religion at UND for a longer time than any other, with the possible exception of Professor Robert Mullins, resigned in 1970. The Wesley Board of Trustees generously extended the funding of his position for an additional year, enabling the department to develop a curriculum in the area of Asian religions. Dr. Krishna Sivaraman, a scholar and teacher of international renown from Banaras University in India, was appointed and contributed much during his short stay at UND. He currently teaches at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. He was succeeded by Dr. Jung Young Lee in 1972, who has continued to the present to teach courses in the area of History of Religions. Dr. Lee has published nearly a book a year since coming to UND and is one of the most published scholars on campus. He has published two books of commentary on

the *I Ching* and a volume on the Asian understanding of death, in all ten books and over thirty articles. Lee recently published a study of Korean Shamanism, the first in a Western language. His position in the department represents a unique feature in the entire University, a full-time teacher and scholar in the area of Far Eastern thought. He is also the first member of the faculty to be promoted to full professor.

Following the senate recommendations of 1966 with regard to the funding of the positions in the department, the University gradually assumed financial responsibility. In 1962 the National Student Association, headquartered in Chicago, funded positions in three different universities as pilot projects to assist state institutions in initiating the academic teaching of religion. The University of North Dakota was one chosen with a view to separating and distinguishing the professorships from the campus ministry. Dr. Donald Ziemke, a Ph.D. graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary, was the first appointee in 1962. Dr. Herbert Neve, Christus Rex campus pastor and instructor of religion in affiliation with UND welcomed the new initiative. Ziemke had no official ministerial responsibilities and could serve full-time in the transition/formation of the new Department of Religion. He taught for three years and served one year as chairman until leaving in 1965. In 1966 his successor under the same arrangement was Alvin D. Mattson, Jr., son of a distinguished professor of Christian Ethics at Augustana Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois. While at UND the younger Mattson received his doctorate from Hartford Theological Seminary and contributed to the Honors and Humanities offerings, which had been established by Moulton, Branconnier and Ziemke before him. Mattson developed courses in the philosophy of religion, special topics, and religion in America, which have become a permanent part of the curriculum. In 1968 the University assumed financial responsibility for his position after the National Lutheran Student Association funding ran out. This was in accordance with its original purpose and intention. Mattson's sudden death on July 1, 1971, at the age of forty-three deprived the department and the campus community of a respected colleague. In 1966, Robert Branconnier, one of the principal architects of the department, left teaching to devote himself full-time to campus ministry and anti-war activity. Likewise Robert Mullins, who taught a number of years under Newman Foundation affiliation, moved to the Philosophy Department, where he became a popular lecturer. Professor Mullins recently retired after a distinguished career in the areas of both religion and philosophy.

Sr. Ann Patrick Ware, from Webster College in Missouri, replaced Branconnier and taught for two years in the areas of biblical studies, religious classics, and ethics. She left UND in 1968 to take a position in the ecumenical section of the National Council of Churches in New York. Dr. George Frein, the present chairman, was appointed to replace Ware in the Fall of 1968, with part-time duties in the New School, which was inaugurated in the same year.

An experimental project in 1969 brought to the department teaching interns from Garrett Theological Seminary, Chicago, with encouragement and support from the local Wesley Center of Religion, newly named after the dissolution of former Wesley College. For three years interns Sam Gratz, Ron Helgeson and Fred Detwiler acted as teaching assistants in religious studies and discussion leaders in the university humanities program. Detwiler has recently earned a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Pennsylvania State University.

In retrospect the decade of the sixties saw the formation and growth of a distinct, autonomous Department of Religious Studies with a program offering a major and minor in the field. The curriculum was expanded to include the areas of Jewish Studies and Asian Religions. The close ties with the centers was superseded and the University had assumed full academic and financial responsibility for the department. This move benefited the religious centers as well, since it made their work clearly pastoral and liturgical. Separate standing and interdisciplinary involvement with the Honors and Humanities Programs has secured the position of religious studies as a humanistic discipline.

In the 1970's Dr. Frein brought new and imaginative revisions in the introductory courses. Each member of the department offered a section in Contemporary Moral Issues. Dr. Lee expanded offerings featuring the sacred texts of Eastern religions, which supplemented the courses in biblical studies. A popular interdisciplinary course on Death and Dying became a part of the regular curriculum. Courses on the Philosophy of Religion were team-taught in conjunction with the Philosophy Department. A course on the Lessons of the Holocaust was offered and team-taught by Professors Potter and Theodore Reiff of the School of Medicine, who was named Adjunct Professor of Religious Studies.

Members of the department have contributed courses in the Communitary adult education program, sponsored jointly by the University and Greater Forks religious communities; have sponsored a Conference on the Bible in America, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Society of Biblical Literature, the oldest academic society in the United States; and have given lectures to various groups in the community, religious and civic. All are members of the American Academy of Religion, the professional organization of teachers of religion in North America, as well as societies of specialized areas in the field of religious studies. In addition the faculty has participated in various symposia and workshops on religion and medicine, religion and the law, and the recent presidential conference on peace.

The number of students majoring in religious studies has gradually increased in recent years. The emphasis, however, has not been on majors, but on religious studies as a significant factor in attaining a liberal education. To quote a recent brochure of the department: "Because religious studies try to see things in the largest possible framework and from the point of view of ultimate meaning, a religious studies major or minor is a good undergraduate preparation for any future career or profession. UND religious studies students are presently pursuing careers in law, medicine, teaching, ministry and social work." Men and women graduates from UND's Department of Religious Studies have gone on to become professors of religious studies in various institutions, ordained ministers in various denominations, one is a member of a Buddhist monastery and others are members of the medical, legal and journalistic professions.

The current members of the department are George Frein, professor and chairman since 1977, Jung Young Lee, professor, Gerald Potter, associate professor, and Lester Meyer, visiting professor.

In 1980 Carl Olson, University of Southern Illinois, was temporary replacement for Dr. Lee, who was on two developmental leaves in Korea. In 1972 and 1973 Anthony Cecil was replacement for George Frein who was on leave of absence

for two years. In 1969 George Frein was the recipient of an Outstanding Teacher Award at UND, and in 1978 received a Bush Foundation Grant for summer study at the Jung Institute in San Francisco.

UND's Religious Studies Department is in keeping with the U. S. Supreme Court decision on June 13, 1963: "One's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study...of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular process of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment."

August, 1982